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FM AMEMBASSY MINSK

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6089

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 1581

RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY

RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L MINSK 000457

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/30/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: MALADY FRONT LEADERS FINED, NOT IMPRISONED

REF: A. MINSK 228

[B.](#) MINSK 400

[C.](#) MINSK 431

[D.](#) 06 MINSK 1166

[E.](#) MINSK 352

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reason 1.4 (d).

[¶1.](#) (U) On May 29, a Minsk court convicted five opposition youth organization Maldy Front (MF) leaders on politically motivated charges of running and/or acting in behalf of an unregistered organization (refs A, B, and C). Despite the prosecutor's request for "corrective labor" for Anastasiya Palazhanka, a legal minor, and for heavy fines of USD 7,260 for Dmitry Fedaruk, Bois Goretskiy, Oleg Korban, and Aleksey Yanushevsiy (tried in absentia), the judge issued an official warning to Palazhanka and fines of USD 580 against Fedaruk and USD 435 against the remaining MF members. Although the defendants denied that they are the leaders of MF (ref D), all the activists admitted acting in behalf of the organization. However, they insisted that the law under which they were charged violated Belarus' constitution and international law.

[¶2.](#) (U) Throughout the trial, which was observed by Ambassador and EU and OSCE Heads of Mission, the judge and prosecutor were visibly frustrated by the constant chants and whistles of dozens of MF supporters outside the courthouse and by the absence of most of the prosecution's witnesses. Those witnesses who did appear, all of them MF activists, refused to provide incriminating testimony against their compatriots. Among the witnesses was 13-year-old Nikita Ivanovich, who defiantly told the judge, "I refuse to answer your questions because my parents are not here," and abruptly left the courtroom to the cheers of the defendants' supporters.

[¶3.](#) (C) After the sentencing, ardent MF supporter and former opposition presidential candidate Aleksander Milinkevich, who observed the entire trial, communicated his heartfelt thanks and quietly told us, "We all know that you (the USG) did this." As we left the courthouse, the MF activists and their crowd of supporters expressed their deepest gratitude for U.S. support and repeatedly said to us, "Long live Belarus and long live America."

Comment

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[¶4.](#) (C) Although we expected fines instead of prison time, we are nevertheless relieved. The relatively light sentences most likely result from the regime's effort to follow through on overtures made by GOB Presidential Administration Deputy Natalya Petkevich during EUR DAS David Kramer's recent visit to Minsk (ref E) and subsequently by Embassy contacts.

However, we have yet to see any concrete GOB moves toward freeing Belarusian political prisoners who were not already scheduled for release in the near future. We will continue to closely monitor their situations and call for the release of all political prisoners.

Stewart